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ABSTRACT

This document, part of a series of papers which describe the assessment of student learning in various school curriculum areas from prekindergarten through grade 12, focuses on the assessment of student learning in fine arts education. After an overview of current curriculum goals in fine arts education, subsequent sections describe performance-based and self-assessment as they relate to the fine arts disciplines of dance, music, theater/drama, and the visual arts. State activities and guidelines and a brief summary of issues in fine arts education are also provided. Portfolio and performance-based assessment methods are well-established in the fine arts, where they have been field tested and documented. In contrast, in many fields authentic assessments of this sort are just emerging. The assessment strategies used in fine arts provide well-developed models that can be useful in other fields and disciplines. (SLD)

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ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING IN FINE ARTS

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in the Assessment of Student Learning

March 1993

The South Carolina Center for Excellence in the Assessment of Student Learning was established by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and the College of Education, University of South Carolina

South Carolina Center for Excellence in the Assessment of Student Learning (CEASL)

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING IN FINE ARTS

Foreword

This report is part of a series of documents by the South Carolina Center for Excellence in the Assessment of Student Learning (CEASL) to describe assessment of student learning in various school curriculum areas from prekindergarten through grade twelve. The focus of this document is assessment of student learning in the fine arts classroom. The report begins with an overview of current curriculum goals in fine arts education. The subsequent sections describe performance-based and self-assessment as they relate to the fine arts disciplines of dance, music, theater/drama and the visual arts. State activities and guidelines and a brief summary of issues in fine arts education are also provided.

The South Carolina Center for Excellence in the Assessment of Student Learning was established by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and is supported by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and the College of Education, University of South Carolina. The purpose of this Center is to increase awareness among teacher-educators of recent efforts to change approaches used to assess students' learning in pre-school through high school, and to encourage and support efforts to enhance training in testing, measurement and the assessment of students' learning for preservice educators. The Center is based on the educational philosophy that the fair, accurate and informative assessment of students' learning is an integral part of the teaching-learning process.

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Comments or suggestions concerning the information in this report are welcome and may be directed to the authors at the Center.

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Arts Education Curriculum Trends and Goals

Two different perspectives on the purposes of education in the arts are found in the literature. On one hand, art education experiences are seen as having value for their own sake because an educated person should have knowledge, understanding and experiences related to the visual and performing arts. However, others advocate arts education because such experiences result in "...the attainment of knowledge, understandings, and skills that contribute to the student's intellectual, social, emotional and physical development" (Williams, 1991, p.5). This perspective is expressed in the South Carolina Visual and Performing Arts Framework (South Carolina Department of Education, 1992) which points out that what learners gain from a comprehensive instructional program in the arts enhances their experience and level of success in other school subjects.

Howard Gardner, with Harvard Project Zero, theorizes about seven different "intelligences," including musical, spatial, and body-kinesthetic, which can be recognized through experiences in the arts (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). He contends that abilities cultivated in such areas as visual arts, dance, mime, and the use of the body, are essential for full development of the human mind (Brandt, 1987 p.30). Consistent with this broad vision of intellectual development, the Alberta Department of Education (1991) advocates offering "an articulated fine arts program" throughout the grades to enhance the depth and breadth of expression and intuitive response. This expanded conception of the purposes of education in the arts suggests the need for systematic strategies to assess student learning in the arts.

Dimensions of Fine Arts Curriculum

The Center for Education in the Arts established by the J. Paul Getty Trust has had major influence on school level curriculum and instruction. Based on a series of interviews with leading art educators, the Center began to promote a "discipline-based" approach to art education. This approach recognizes history, aesthetics and criticism, and performance or production as critical areas for learning. The Getty Institute for Educators in the Visual Arts was created to develop and test a model for the implementation of this approach. The work of this Institute and the endorsement of National Endowment for the Arts has had considerable influence on education in the arts. (Leonhard, 1991).

Assessment Techniques In K-12 Fine Arts Classrooms

Consensus seems to exist for including the domains of history, aesthetics, criticism and performance in the curriculum scope and sequence for the areas of dance, theater, music, and visual arts (Leonhard, 1991). However, examples of evaluation of student learning in

performance and critique are much more abundant and well described than measures of student learning in history and aesthetics. Assessment in the various domains of the arts is critical because holding students accountable by some measure of accomplishment of learning communicates to students, teachers, and the public the importance and value of studying a discipline.

Performance-Based Assessment

A tradition of performance- or product-based assessment exists in the arts. There is a long history of musicians performing in recitals, painters exhibiting their work, and commercial artists developing portfolios. Evaluation of such performances or products in fine arts classrooms is usually accomplished through the use of teacher checklists. These checklists may be kept independently or as part of a portfolio. The checklists are completed after a one-time performance or may be filled out and updated over a period of time to document student growth. Such assessment of learners' creative expression focuses on what they know how to do and demonstration of their ability to synthesize "arts knowledge and skills to communicate personal ideas and feelings" (South Carolina Department of Education, 1992, p. 14).

In the following sections the use of performance-based assessment in school level fine arts classes will be reported. Some of the discussion refers to assessment based on a single event, product, or performance. In other cases the assessments are done through review of a portfolio of work or documentation of efforts. The use of portfolios typically enables the assessment to be multi-dimensional and to examine change or the development of skills or understanding over time.

Dance

The Iowa State Department of Education curriculum guide (1986) suggests a five-level evaluation scale with categories ranging from "excellent to "poor" for use in evaluating a performance focusing on movement skills in dance. The same scale is applied to assess technique, projection, stage presence, sensitivity to rhythm, and appearance in judging the performance of a dance composition. In assessment of choreography itself, the five-level scale is applied to assess motivation, theme, creativeness and movement.

A portfolio assessment is used to look at the "...dance-like movements of young children...their sensitivities to the rhythmic and expressive elements of creative movement" as part of the Project Spectrum Approach (Gardner, Feldman & Wexler-Sherman, 1988, p.81). The evaluation is based on observing a standard set of moves during weekly sessions rather than considering performance on only a single occasion and is conducted through careful observation of videotapes of the sessions. The video tape approach allows consideration of the child's ability to adapt, invent, and replicate movements in a variety of contexts such as dances, plays and movement games.

Music

The challenge of evaluating performance in music has been addressed in several ways. The work of Project ZERO, Educational Testing Service, and Pittsburgh Schools has developed strategies to assess performance and note changes in student performance over time (Brandt, 1987-88). The Curriculum Guide from Iowa (1986) provides a sample checklist which may be used as a model for student performance evaluation in music. The sample is designed for use with those studying string instruments. The three-point rating scale (1=consistently does this well; 2=working to achieve this; and 3=improvement needed) is used to judge subskills focusing on the three areas of technique, ensemble skills, and citizenship.

The "Junior High Instrumental Music: Wind Percussion Strings Curriculum Guide," prepared by the Alberta Department of Education in Canada, suggests assessment policies and procedures should be flexible to insure a comprehensive evaluation of students' progress, achievement, strengths and weaknesses. The guide recommends that each student should be assessed on a solo performance monthly, even if that is only a very short solo. A narrative evaluation record might be kept to report the evaluation of these solos. Other assessment might occur based on private performance, playing in the ensemble, assignments, written tests, students testing students, self-evaluation, and taped performances.

The province of Alberta, Canada, has also published a teachers' manual for high school choral music. A rating scale is included which evaluates rhythm, pitch, and note accuracy, dynamics and breathing, as well as a sample music progress sheet, and report card for band or choral music.

Drama/Theater

Performance-based assessment is also the focus of evaluation of learning in drama and theater. The Inventory of Dramatic Behavior Adapted for Group Observation (IDBG) identifies several dimensions for assessing improvisational drama by groups of school-aged children (Rosenberg, Pinciotti & Smith, 1984). This strategy is designed for use with small groups of children and requires that several trained observers participate in the evaluation process. Students perform three different improvisations without dialogue, props, or scenery. The observers are assigned three or four subjects to continuously rate. The observers watch for the following behaviors throughout the activity: dramatic incidents, dramatic acts, repeated acts, space used, characters created, and interactions. The measure of these behaviors indicates students' ability to be physically expressive and to communicate in a non-verbal fashion.

Visual Arts

The work of the ARTS PROPEL project demonstrates the use of portfolios to enhance summative evaluations in the visual arts. The assessment examines student work collected over time and is not based only on final products. The portfolio is prepared by students and includes drafts, notes, false starts, and things the student does and does not like. (Brandt,

1987-88). Wolf (1987-88) commends the ARTS PROPEL assessments because these assessment approaches help teachers develop the skill to "read student growth in learning from beginning ideas to final products" (p.24). She refers to the assessment as "independent problem solving in the arts."

Self-Assessment, Critique and Aesthetic Valuing

In many ways art education is ahead of other school curriculum areas in its attempts to conduct assessment in the more subjective domain of aesthetic expertise and knowledge. For the most part, assessments of aesthetics are based on written products. The assessment outlined in the South Carolina Frameworks (South Carolina Department of Education, 1992) examines evidence that students can compare and contrast aesthetic qualities in different works, can identify and interpret meaning in works of art, and can articulate, explain and defend the criteria they use to make judgements about quality or preference for a work of art. Consideration is given to student responses to "aesthetic" questions such as: What counts as a work of art? How does a work of art express meaning? What is the value of art in human (and one's own) existence?

Dance

The National Endowment for the Arts (1991) included samples of written assignments completed by sixth grade students in their case study reports. The assignments were completed as part of a comprehensive "Dance Jury" examination which focused on student discussion of their experiences with composition/choreography and student self-evaluation of their work in the dance department. Students in grades 8 and 9 were also expected to discuss a dance that they choreographed and a self-evaluation of their learning over the past school year. Another written examination for grades seven and eight asked student to outline a class they might offer on one of the dance techniques they had learned (modern, ballet or Dunham).

Music

Portfolios are used to assess knowledge and ability in music (Wolf, 1987-88). Wolf defines a portfolio as, "a chronologically sequenced collection of work that records the long-term evolution of artistic thinking." Portfolios enable students and teachers to see "the processes that underlie long-term development" (p. 27). The author goes into detail about how a music portfolio is kept on a series of cassette tapes and are played to a group of musicians to invite reflection, commentary and comparisons with previous work. Reflective interviews as an extension of the portfolio process invite students to judge themselves. The result is that by the end of a semester the student has a "...picture of what has developed, how it came into being, where difficulties remain, and directions for future work" (p. 28).

Drama/Theater

The Iowa State Department of Education's Document on Theater (1986) suggests the use of non-testing techniques to integrate critique/self-evaluation and performance-based assessment of K-12 student learning in theater. They describe different strategies which might be appropriate for different levels of schooling. A sample form from the Fine Arts Division of the Texas Education Agency is included in the Iowa materials to provide a means of making both formative and summative evaluations of drama/theater at the elementary level. Student journals, written reports and critiques of performances are suggested for use at the middle/junior high level. These measures are expanded into preparations of portfolios and participation in auditions at the secondary school level. A model for evaluation at the high school level focuses on oral performance, written performance, and classroom participation.

Visual Arts

The Rockefeller Foundation is sponsoring ARTS PROPEL which is a coalition involving Project ZERO, the Educational Testing Service, and the Pittsburgh Schools. The purpose of ARTS PROPEL is to develop ways to assess student achievement in the visual arts. Informal assessment of visual perception, reflection and production in visual arts is attained through the "Mona Lisa exercise," which was developed by this project. The exercise focuses on visual perception as it begins with a slide show of reproductions and then shows a slide of the original Mona Lisa painting. Student reflections are invited through discussions of differences in the slide representations. Finally, students are involved in production by actually copying a work as simple as someone's signature or as complicated as the Mona Lisa (Brandt, 1987-88).

Oral interviews administered to each student by parent volunteers are used to measure student learning in visual art at Longfellow Elementary school in Bozeman, Montana. Each child is asked to look at a picture and talk about it during the interview. Parents write the children's answers down for both a pre- and a post-test. The data are scored only after the post test is administered. Scoring involves the strategy used by the "Advanced Placement Studio Art Portfolio Evaluation" designed by the College Board. A three point rubric is used to guide scoring of comments about technical properties such as the medium or tools used, formal properties such as unity, theme, and variation, and interpretation considering feeling or mood.

State Activities Related To Fine Arts Curriculum

Various states have initiated efforts to review and reform k-12 education in the arts. These include North Carolina (1985), Iowa (1986), Indiana (1987), Wisconsin (1988), California (1989), South Carolina (1990), Maryland (1990), Arizona (1990), and Colorado

(1991) . The state efforts focus on development of fine arts frameworks and curriculum or proficiency guides. The state of Ohio's visual art curriculum guide won the National Art Education Association's award for best state art curriculum guide in the country in 1983 (Tollifson, 1987-88, p.22). Ohio is joined by Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and West Virginia in the development of "Discipline-Based" Statewide Art Education Curriculum. The states mentioned above in the discussion of fine arts curriculum guides have also been involved in this effort.

At local levels, documentation of the discipline-based approach to arts education also shows a major commitment to children's progress in the arts. Many individual school districts, such as Virginia Beach, have been recognized for their developments in K-12 visual art education curriculum (Brickell, Jones & Runyan, 1987-88, p.15-16). Professional organizations have also had considerable influence over changes in education in the arts. For example, the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance has produced "Dance Curriculum Guidelines" (1988).

State Guidelines for Assessing Students in the Arts

State Frameworks and guides often provide advice about how to assess students' learning in the arts. For example, South Carolina's Visual And Performing Arts Framework (1992), currently available for draft review, describes decisions related to selection, design and the use of assessment strategies to ensure that assessment methods are valid, reliable and objective (p.30). The South Carolina frameworks also suggest careful consideration of the purposes of assessment and call attention to the importance of clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and student in establishing an assessment plan. Examples of different forms of assessment are not included in the current draft of the frameworks.

More detailed frameworks have been produced in the areas of Dance (1990), Art (1988), and Music (1987) by the South Carolina State Department of Education and the need for further work in the area of assessment is recognized. The South Carolina Framework For Dance Education, for example, is organized into four major components (i.e., Aesthetic Perception, Creative Process, Dance Heritage, and Aesthetic Valuing). Each of these is accompanied by sample learning outcomes to allow for the possible sequencing of learning experiences in the K-12 dance curriculum. Measures of these learning outcomes "are still being worked on" (Cook, personal communication, November 12, 1992).

Other states have also focused on development of detailed curriculum guides for fine arts education, with acknowledgement that assessment of student learning must take place. However, specific examples of how to measure what students learn are not provided in the guides. For example, the state of Colorado has published, Colorado Sample Outcomes and Proficiencies for Elementary, Middle and High School Education (1991). This state has denoted "Learner Outcomes/Content Standards" and examples of "Assessment Demonstrations" for all content areas in this publication. The criteria or standards for evaluation have not been developed.

In 1985, North Carolina published a detailed K-12 curriculum for dance, music, theater, visual and folk arts. Included in this North Carolina Standard Course of Study are competency goals, student learning objectives, and "measures" or suggestions for ways in which the students might demonstrate ability or knowledge. Arizona Essential Skills for Performing Arts, K-12. Dance (1990), also gives suggestions for approaches to evaluation; and Fine Arts: A Maryland Curricular Framework (1990), provides appendices which contain "Student Expectancy Levels" in art, dance, music and theater. Indiana's Fine Arts Proficiency Guide (1987) provides proficiency statements which, "describe the educational growth Indiana students are expected to achieve as they acquire skills and techniques in the arts."

Guidelines for the assessment or evaluation of student progress are provided in Visual and Performing Arts Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (1989). Observations, discussions, demonstrations, tests, reports, performances and videotaping are suggested methods by which student development in dance can be observed and assessed over time. However, the guidelines suggest that, "written and verbal evaluation by both student and teacher are...more relevant to the students and their progress in drama...the teacher must choose the appropriate criteria by which each specific area of the student's growth will be measured" (p.61).

Teacher-made checklists often become the instruments used for assessment. The California frameworks recommend that testing of skill development in music should be based on teacher observation of group or individual performances and recommend that factual knowledge be assessed using traditional tests. In the visual arts, the California framework recommends that assessment be a continuous individual process which recognizes the importance of observing students' growth and development in skills, understandings, attitudes, and abilities to respond and express ideas both verbally and visually. As with dance education, the state of California suggests that a range of methods and techniques should be used in the assessment process.

The state of Iowa published four different Guides to Curriculum Development in the Arts in 1986. The publication for Visual Arts, for example, explains that

> "effective evaluation of student learning in art is...complex. Art educators are challenged to develop evaluation methods which measure the full range of student artistic knowledge, skill, response and expression. Evaluation must extend beyond paper and pencil and standardized tests, both of which focus on narrow outcomes." (p. 50).

Sample "teaching strategies" or lesson plans which include guidelines for evaluation of student learning are included in each of the four Iowa guides.

The state of Wisconsin has also published A Guide to Curriculum Planning in Dance (1988), which provides sample learning units with suggested evaluation of student learning activities.

Summary of Issues in Fine Arts Education

The commentary on the "National Assessment of Educational Progress in the Arts," (Gardner & Grunbaum, 1986) was commissioned by the study group on the National Assessment of Student Achievement. Gardner and Grunbaum (1986) describe the arts in some school systems as nonexistent, or considered to be "frills" or extra-curricular activities that are the first to be dropped when budget cuts are in order. Regular classroom teachers, who in most cases lack artistic training, are most likely to be teaching visual art, music, drama or dance classes in the elementary grades. A wide variation of art forms and classroom learning objectives exist at the middle/junior high and secondary school levels, with a serious lack of articulation in grades k-12 fine arts study. The authors comment that, there is great disparity in both the quantity and quality of artistic education in different settings. They also report little agreement about what ought to be taught in the arts and how learning should be assessed.

Other efforts to examine the state of curriculum and instruction in the arts (e.g., Greer & Silverman, 1987-88; Leonhard, 1991) report an equally bleak picture. Visual arts education seems be better off than other areas of the arts. Nearly all elementary school respondents to the "Status of Arts Education Survey," offer an art program, 80% of which have a written curriculum for each grade. Yet inadequacies are found in the amount of time devoted to art instruction, an average of 54 minutes per week in elementary schools, and serious deficiencies in materials and supplies were reported.

Assessment in arts education makes extensive use of a variety of procedures including portfolios and performance tasks. These assessment approaches are well established, field tested, and documented in the arts while they are newly emerging in other curriculum areas. The assessment strategies in the arts provide well developed models which can be useful in other fields and disciplines and offer insight into the range of possibilities to consider when constructing a multidimensional assessment system. Educators interested in performance-based authentic assessment have much to gain from a careful study of assessment in arts education.

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